

Chapter 3 deepens this unusual but very promising look at society as a whole through an analysis of the written word as used by children in schools. Until now, early child education has hardly been mentioned in contemporary scholarship, yet schools were an integral part of urban life. The primary aim of these schools was memorizing the Quran. However, pupils also learnt to read and write in the schools and manuals explained how to teach these skills to children. Special children's curricula were developed. Schools for children were thus often found in religious endowments. The deeds of the endowments mentioned the enhancement of writing skills as one stipulation of the founder. With the increasing number of endowments, the number of schools increased in the twelfth century. This was possible also because teachers' salaries were now provided by the endowments and not from pupil contributions (p. 101).

Chapter 4 concentrates on libraries. Hirschler describes how the "ruler libraries", which dominated the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, disappeared at the expense of smaller endowment libraries. Moreover, he stresses that it is a misconception to say that the golden age of libraries ended with the destruction of large libraries in the Mongol and Crusader period. First, many of the manuscripts from the libraries which were assumed to have been destroyed reappeared in other libraries: the Mongols did indeed destroy many things but there are clear hints that libraries continued to function under their rule. Hirschler therefore argues that, in the medieval period, a new library culture with smaller but more accessible libraries emerged in the city centres. The increase in the number of libraries, which contained more and more popular volumes of folk tales alongside the religious literature, is in Hirschler's view closely connected (as in the case of children's schools) to new endowment practices.

Chapter 5 describes the rise of the popular epics like the *Sīrat 'Antar* or the *Sīrat Baybars* and how religious scholars reacted quite negatively to this development. They feared, rightly, that they would lose their monopoly on the written word and they objected on the non-religious nature of the genre.

Overall one has to acknowledge that *The Written Word* is very well written, straightforward to follow in spite of the large area it covers geographically and chronologically, and extremely well researched. If one has to find a lacuna it is that the economic perspective is not treated in depth. Was the popularization not also linked to the fact that writing materials became cheaper and new techniques were introduced? Another issue for further investigation would be to analyse why exactly endowments alloyed in such a symbiosis to the written word? The section on the reasons for the rise of endowments in the medieval Islamic world might have gone into more detail.

But this does not take away the innovative character of this excellent study. The award of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies book prize 2012 is truly deserved.

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DAVID KNIPP (ed.):

Siculo-Arabic Ivories and Islamic Painting 1100–1300.

Proceedings of the International Conference, Berlin, 6–8 July 2007.

(Römische Forschungen der Bibliotheca Herziana.) 338 pp. Munich:

Hirmer Verlag, 2011. ISBN 978 3 7774 4311 9.

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The Cornish town of Bodmin is not renowned for its collection of Islamic art. But inside the parish church of St Petroc, a remarkable object has lain quietly for almost a thousand years. It is an ivory casket delicately painted with birds and plants, made by craftsmen working within a Muslim tradition probably in Sicily. How did it get to Cornwall in the twelfth century? Where was it made and for what purpose? This is one of the subjects explored in the selection of papers originally presented at a conference in Berlin on the large group of painted ivory containers and their decorative schemes, now brought together in this beautifully edited and fully illustrated publication.

The ivory caskets and boxes are neither clearly Islamic nor Christian in their iconography. Haloed saints and priests are painted onto some of the boxes, while others are decorated with Arabic inscriptions and images of the ruler that are familiar to students of Fatimid art from nearby Egypt. Their ambiguous decoration carries through into the manufacture and use of the boxes – technically they seem to belong to an Islamic tradition, yet they survive largely in Christian church treasuries as containers for relics. This kind of object of material culture can easily fall between the gaps in academic scholarship because it fails to slot neatly into traditional art-historical classifications.

This publication is further evidence of a growing interest in such “hybrid” objects and in ivories in particular. Luxury ivories produced in the medieval Mediterranean have been the subject of several major studies in recent years. A fantastic two-volume edition of the *Journal of the David Collection* in Copenhagen was dedicated to the carved ivories of al-Andalus, arguably the high point of carved ivory production. The Gothic Ivories Online project at the Courtauld Institute offers a comprehensive and exemplary approach to the study of these objects – although sadly it does not include ivories from Islamic Spain or Sicily within its scope. The Salerno Ivories project at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence brings together a group of scholars from different backgrounds and perspectives to study a group of carved ivories combining Islamic, Byzantine and Latin features. A conference organized by SOAS at the Warburg Institute in June 2013 focused thoughts on the trade in ivory and how it may have influenced the production of luxury ivory goods in the early medieval period.

The key issues addressed here are those of patronage, place of production, consumption and original function, as well as the iconographic and technical relationship to the arts of everywhere from Byzantium to Egypt, Spain to Sicily and southern Italy. The volume of fifteen papers is divided into three sections – on manufacture, iconography and parallel currents in Islamic art – with an appendix of a catalogue of the ivories exhibited at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin in 2007.

The value of technical analysis is made clear in Anthony Cutler’s meticulous study of how the objects were made and decorated. Despite the presence of typically Christian motifs on many of the caskets, he suggests that we should not infer the faith of the craftsmen from the decoration. Indeed he questions whether many of the images that have been interpreted as Christian saints (standing figures with haloes for example) should instead be understood as more generic figures. The statistic that only 3 per cent of the surviving caskets (that is five in total) carry specifically Christian iconography, is remarkable given the disproportionate attention this group receives in the literature.

Avinoam Shalem focuses on the decoration of the caskets and the aesthetic experience of the person examining the object. He looks at hidden decoration, on the undersides and insides of the caskets, suggesting that the artist treated these areas differently from the more visible panels. These hidden parts were spaces for the artist to experiment and explore fantastical ideas and motifs without constriction.

Mariam Rosser-Owen and Antony Eastmond explore new ways of looking at these caskets in their papers on a casket at the V&A and on the St Petroc casket respectively. They avoid traditional stylistic and iconographical comparisons which tend to lead to a discussion about Christian versus Muslim motifs, in favour of detailed studies of how the objects were made and how they might have been sold and dispersed.

Indeed the analysis of the production and consumption of the ivories in this volume indicates that the caskets were made in workshops that were independent of the twelfth-century royal Norman court of Roger II in Sicily. They seem to have been made for a speculative market in which they would have been constructed and even painted to order, before being sold on by individual merchants.

Objects move, and in the medieval Mediterranean world, they moved a lot. Textiles, ceramics, rock crystal and ivories were all traded and exchanged, greatly influencing decorative styles in the various production centres. The notion of a shared artistic language within a wider region and the movement of objects is well illustrated in Finbarr Barry Flood's contribution on Ghaznavid figural imagery and the circulation westward of manuscripts.

The volume's editor David Knipp rightly points out in his introduction that the term "Siculo Arabic ivories" is a misleading one. It suggests that this is a straightforward group of painted and gilded ivory containers made in Sicily by Muslim craftsmen. The papers in this volume reveal a much more complicated story, in which the identify of the craftsmen as Muslims is far from certain – in fact I would suggest that their religious faith is not particularly relevant. Perhaps a new term needs to be found to describe these objects, one which focuses on their Mediterranean origins rather than prioritizes the supposed faith or ethnic identity of their makers. Cutler argues convincingly that the term only distracts from the more interesting and productive questions about how, why and for whom the containers were made – questions which are comprehensively addressed in this impressive volume.

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DENIS E. MCAULEY:

Ibn 'Arabī's Mystical Poetics.

(Oxford Oriental Monographs.) ix, 255 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. £70. ISBN 978 0 19 965954 8.

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Denis McAuley is to be commended for his recent study of Ibn 'Arabī's *Dīwān*, a formidable collection of poems composed in a number of meters, forms, and styles. McAuley pays careful attention to Ibn 'Arabī's poetics and his mystical doctrines, giving each their due. In his introduction, he reviews previous scholarship on Ibn 'Arabī's verse, and the *Dīwān* in particular, which some scholars have regarded as "cold and mannered" (p. 3). McAuley is more nuanced when he notes: "Most of the poetry of the *Dīwān* is not lyrical. It is directly concerned with mystical doctrine, but it is too elusive to act as a teaching tool" (p. 12). In chapter 1, McAuley provides an overview of Ibn 'Arabī's theosophy in which God uses His many names to bring about creation in a series of emanations. Hence all of creation partakes of Absolute Existence if only in a limited way, and this paradox of the One and the